DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 193 JC 030 632

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TITLE	The New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program: A Strategic Approach.
PUB DATE	2002-02-28
NOTE	10p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Aging in Academia; College Faculty; *Community Colleges; Diversity (Faculty); Faculty; *Faculty Development; Faculty Recruitment; Retirement; School Orientation; Staff Orientation; Teacher Orientation; *Teacher Retirement; Teachers; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Northern Virginia Community College

ABSTRACT

This document describes a potential crisis at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) due to the large numbers of faculty who are approaching or have already reached retirement age. NVCC is the third largest community college in the nation, made up of five campuses, soon to be six, and an Extended Learning Institute for distance learning. NVCC mirrors their diverse community with an equally diverse student, staff and faculty population. A study by the NVCC Office of Institutional Research found that a large number of the current staff are eligible to retire and many more are approaching eligibility. The Division Chairs Round Table (DCRT) met to discuss how to confront the potential crises of hiring as much as 50% of the division's instructional faculty at one time. The article reviews research on the successful nature of orientation and mentoring programs for faculty. It also describes a plan developed by the DCRT to create a New Faculty Orientation Task Force and the specifics of the task force including the members, the budget, the meeting schedule, and the proposed goals. Following this, the paper describes the development, implementation and the outcomes of the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program. Includes a figure illustrating the phases of the NVCC New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program. (JS)

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The New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program: A Strategic Approach

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Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC), the largest in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), opened its doors in the fall of 1965. Its first semester's enrollments totaled 761 students. Today, NVCC has more than 38,500 students enrolled in Fall 2001, and the college has grown to become the third largest in the nation. The college is made up of five campuses, soon to be six (Alexandria, Annandale, Loudoun, Manassas, Medical Education, and Woodbridge), and an Extended Learning Institute for distance learning serving a densely populated northern Virginia suburbia of the nation's capital. The community in which the college is located is very diverse, and the college's enrollments, faculty, and staff mirror that diversity. Over 62% of the students enrolled at NVCC are members of minority groups. The college provides occupational-technical and transfer education for its students through 77 different majors and 162 distinct academic programs.

The faculty and staff who were employed in 1965 when the college began are now reaching the age of retirement. In fact a study completed by the college's Office of Institutional Research found that

> [a]t the Alexandria campus, 57 faculty members (34%) could retire, while 89 faculty members (37%) could retire at the Annandale campus. At the Loudoun campus, 12 faculty members (22%) could retire, and at the Manassas and Woodbridge campuses, nine (15%) and 18 (23%) faculty members, respectively, could retire. ...Academic divisions on all campuses could be affected, to varying degrees, if all faculty members eligible to retire actually retire (Gabriel 1999).

Of those faculty identified as eligible to retire by 2003 36% of the faculty at NVCC were 60 years of age or older with less than 25 years of service, 17% were 60 and had 25 years of service or more, and 47% were younger than 60 and had 25 years of service or more.

The Division Chairs Round Table, a working group of 17 division chairs from all the campuses at the college, became very concerned when they read this information. At its monthly meetings the group began discussing at its monthly meetings ways of confronting the potential crisis of hiring in some cases as much as 50% of the division's entire instructional faculty at one time. Discussion turned towards taking advantage of the "seasoned" instructors before they retired to help identify what corporate knowledge should be passed on to their replacements.

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A review of research on orientation and mentoring programs revealed that theories on mentoring and the positive effects it has on higher education have not changed a great deal in the last two decades. Merriam, Thomas,and Zeph reported that "faculty with mentors displayed a significantly higher level of career development than did those without mentors" and that "individuals who experienced long-term mentoring achieved more in their careers than did those whose mentorships were briefer" (1987, 202). Kram and Bragar reported that "most matched pairs [mentor/protégé] experience effective 'coaching' relationships that are limited to task-related support," and "planned mentoring programs should be viewed as a springboard for learning how to build developmental alliances beyond the matched relationship" (1992, 235). Wunsch and Johnsrud recommended a "multileveled series of development workshops, seminars, and networking activities" (1992, 175). An "effective program has visibility, administrative support, and just enough structure to facilitate worthwhile activities and to motivate participants to spend valuable time with one another" (Wunsch 1992, 185-6). Finally Blake-Beard reported a strategic mentoring model that organizationally is open and supportive and that developmentally provides varied activities so that the program benefits the individual, the group, and the organization (2000). The Blake-Beard model incorporates Welch's findings that the best model for mentoring includes an initiation phase, a cultivation phase, a separation phase and a redefinition of the professional role (1997, 50).

With this information in mind, the Division Chairs Round Table (DCRT) proposed to college senior administrators the creation of a New Faculty Orientation Task Force. The task force was to be made up of 40 members representing 1) both "seasoned" instructors and "relatively new" instructors, 2) all teaching disciplines, and 3) all campuses. The plan for the task force provided for two Friday afternoon meetings for which participants were to receive a stipend of $100. In addition, the college was to provide lunch and a snack for participants on both days. Total budgeted costs for the task force were $5000. Representatives of the DCRT presented the proposal for creating the task force to the President who immediately funded its activities.

Division chairs nominated exemplary instructors from their divisions, and a subcommittee of division chairs selected the diverse membership to include all targeted groups. Two Friday afternoons were scheduled in September and October 1999 for the 40 members of the task force to meet. At the first meeting task force members used brainstorming techniques to identify what new faculty members need to know in order to become effective instructors. By the end of the session 20 modules were identified as being important parts of the information needed to be an effective member of NVCC's academic community. At the second meeting task force members developed the activities to be included in the modules, assigned them a priority in relation to the immediacy of their presentation, suggested who might lead the presentation of the modules, and defined some of the roles and perks for those who agreed to become mentors to the new faculty. The goal was to implement the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program by Fall 2000. (Program modules are made available on the program's website, http://www.nvcc.vccs.edu/woodbridge/chdivision/Orientation/FacOrientation.htm.)

The final program developed by the instructional faculty task force members and adopted by not only the DCRT but also the college's Administrative Council consists of activities over a three-year period. The first year is the initiation phase in which mentors educate their protégés about the college, serve as role models for them as they embark on their teaching careers, and coach and encourage them in their academic roles. The second year is the cultivation phase during which the mentors sponsor their protégés in college activities, they counsel them and even protect them as the protégés become more deeply involved in campus and college life, and they also become colleagues and friends. The last year is the redefinition phase in which the protégés polish their instructional skills, they feel more comfortable working within the college's and system's business practices, and the protégés prepare themselves to become instructional leaders among their peers.

INITIATION
- Educate
- Serve as Role Model
- Coach and Encourage

CULTIVATION
- Sponsor in College Activities
- Counsel and Protect
- Become Colleague & Friend

REDEFINITION
- Polish Instructional Skills
- Understand Business Practices
- Prepare for Instructional Leadership

Figure 1. The Phases of the NVCC New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program.

The mentoring relationship that the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program fosters is two-pronged. It provides professional support for new instructors as they become oriented to the institution and the state system. Mentors and the information modules of the program present various aspects of the new instructor's professional responsibilities. The activities enhance instructors' learning the ropes and preparing for advancement within the college. The college places a heavy emphasis on helping new instructors navigate college and system culture.

The second prong of the mentoring relationship is one of personal support. The program encourages mentors to support and strengthen their protégés' sense of self-competence, self-identity, and their own effectiveness in the new professional role. The mentors serve as role models, and in the collegial relationship they establish with their protégés mentors counsel as they give acceptance and confirmation of a job well done.

The mentoring program at NVCC is a formal one in which division chairs determine who will mentor new instructors. Division chairs try to identify a mentor in the same academic discipline to work with a protégé, but that is not always possible. Then, division chairs try to find a related discipline. The NVCC program does not attempt to match race, ethnicity, or gender in assigning mentors in the program.

The outcomes that the administration identified for the program affect both the individual and the organization. For individual new instructors the college hopes to give them an immediate and stronger sense of being valued. The administration also hopes the program will help new instructors be more productive. Ultimately, the institution hopes new instructors will find more job satisfaction if they feel more at ease with their job. For mentors the program provides them with an opportunity for networking among colleagues college-wide and across disciplines (a problem at large, multi-campus institutions). The program also acknowledges the mentors as instructional leaders among the master teachers at NVCC.

Outcomes enhancing the organization are also intrinsic to the program. The organization will benefit by retaining more new instructors. The faculty will have more opportunities for collegial networking. The program will provide more opportunities for professional growth and development, not only for the new instructors but also for the mentors. Communication among the various working units and campuses at the college will be greatly enhanced because new instructors will get to know each other through the program as they get to know their colleagues across the disciplines more readily. Enhanced communication will foster greater collaboration on college-wide projects. Ultimately, there will be more instructional effectiveness as a result of the program through increased knowledge of best practices in teaching and learning.

The DCRT had a program ready to be implemented, but there was no funding or identified leadership. In conversations with the college President, the DCRT decided to identify a faculty member to be the coordinator of the orientation/mentoring program. A plan was adopted that the division chairs would encourage "seasoned" instructors who were members of the initial task force to self-identify their interest in leading the program. The plan also included asking that individual to apply for a Commonwealth's Professorship through the VCCS in order to fund the program.

In the meantime, the Provosts who served on the college's Budget Advisory Committee took it upon themselves to allocate $106,000 of institutional priority funding to the DCRT to implement the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program in 2000-2001 along with a New Adjunct Faculty mentoring program. The news of funding was a pleasant surprise to the members of DCRT, and they set to work immediately to decide quickly how to implement an adjunct faculty mentoring program (something not at all considered at that point in time) and how to allocate funding in support of the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program.

In the spring of 2000 Medical Laboratory Technology instructor Judy Horton was selected to lead the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program and submitted a

proposal to compete for the Chancellor's Commonwealth Professorship award. The award confers $3000 per academic year for two years for project expenses plus six credit hours release time for the faculty member's instructional load. This was a competitive professorship, and there was no guarantee that Horton would be a recipient. Therefore, the college President assured the DCRT that the college would provide funding for the program if Horton was not selected. In June 2000 the college was notified that Horton had won the professorship and that the VCCS would fund the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring project.

Since Horton won the Commonwealth's Professorship that provided funding to pay for program costs, the DCRT decided to award a one-time stipend of $600 to each new faculty mentor for their participation in the orientation/mentoring program from the institutional priorities funding. Mentors and new faculty were required to fulfill a specific list of activities during the new instructor's first year of employment that included such things as observing each other's teaching, observing together another instructor teaching, attending college activities together, and reviewing college policies and procedures. (Information on these activities is available on the program's website.) When all the activities had been completed, the supervising division chair would forward documentation of completion to the administration for payment of the stipend. During the first year of the program, over $18,000 in stipends to new faculty mentors were distributed.

Planning and coordinating the implementation of the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program was a complex process for Horton. NVCC is a multi-campus institution made up of seventeen different academic divisions. Horton had to work with all seventeen division chairs and representatives of the Human Resources department to identify new faculty eligible to participate in the program. The hiring system in Virginia mandates that an individual is not "officially hired" until the President approves the job offer in writing. The approval process takes time, frequently up to two months. Horton wanted to make sure that new instructors planned to attend the meetings scheduled for August 2000. Human Resources sent official invitations from the President when the job offer was officially made, but in the mean time most division chairs informed prospective new instructors of the planned meetings during the interview process.

Planning for the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program also involved a bold move to have new instructors and their mentors on campus for two days *before* their contracts officially began. Horton sought and won enthusiastic approval from the President to implement this scheduling strategy.

As the focus of the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program was to share the wealth of information and resources from veteran faculty experiences, Horton planned the modules' presentation using NVCC veteran instructors as presenters. She sent out a "call for speakers" to experienced faculty with a topics list attached. Volunteer responses were immediate from the faculty members. It was actually quite easy to build a two-day program based on the modules topics suggested by the original task force and identify experienced NVCC faculty as presenters. At the same time as Horton built the program

for the first sessions, division chairs assigned mentors to new faculty. Frequently, the mentors were the same individuals who had volunteered to act as presenter/facilitators for the orientation sessions.

Nine resource modules were presented during the first two days of college-wide orientation for new instructors. During the first day, the President met with the group and welcomed them to the NVCC family; Human Resources reviewed full-time employee benefits; and instructors received three different sessions about technological aspects of the student information system, the e-mail system at the college, and how to access all these electronic resources from home. On the second day, new instructors learned about best practices in classroom management, syllabus preparation, and lesson planning while the new mentors received some orientation explaining their role and responsibilities in the program. There was a third day of orientation for new instructors that took place at the individual campuses and within the individual divisions. The modules presented at this time dealt with facilities, business practices, and contractual requirements of the job. New instructors participated in the second semester of their orientation in January 2001 when they attended sessions on learning style differences, individual professional development plans, and how to assess student writing across the disciplines.

In addition to the orientation sessions, each new faculty member who was paired with a mentor met with that personal mentor throughout the year. They completed various activities prescribed by the DCRT, and many created other activities that were of mutual benefit. New instructors also received a year's subscription to the monthly publication, *The Teaching Professor*.

Funds from the Commonwealth's Professorship paid for the meeting expenses for the sessions and for the subscriptions to *The Teaching Professor*. The primary expense from the meetings was food - continental breakfast, lunch, and snack for the all day affairs. The funds also purchased supplies to reproduce the handouts and publications for the sessions. Stipends for the mentors were paid from institutional priorities funds awarded to the DCRT.

There were officially 55 faculty members identified as new or recent hires that were eligible to participate in the first year of the program. Of those 55 Human Resources identified some as being new faculty, but they were never treated as new faculty by their academic divisions. The instructors in question did receive copies of the monthly publication, but they had no other contact with the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program. At the end of the first year division chairs identified 35 new instructors for the August 2000 sessions, and 27 of them participated. In January 2001 an additional 4 new faculty participated in orientation with 25 of the total 39 new faculty remaining active. Retention for year one was 68%. During year two there were 27 new instructors hired at the college with 20 of them participating in New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring. Of the original 39 from year one, 19 returned for their instruction in semester one of year two on academic advising.

Evaluations of the sessions at the program are positive. There has been a sustained number of attendees from August to January to August. Anecdotally, there are positive reports from the mentors as well. Evaluation is continuing. Horton solicits evaluations of each session and an overall evaluation at the end of the first year of the program. Additionally, division chairs review the mentoring checklist with mentors to monitor the mentoring process. (Assessment surveys are available on the program's website.)

What makes the program work as well as it does is the support and consensus received from the DCRT. The college's division chairs worked to develop the concept and supported its implementation as a group. They have been instrumental in disseminating information to new instructors, mentoring the mentors, and urging veteran faculty to serve as speakers for orientation sessions.

Other significant program support comes from the enthusiastic veteran instructors who volunteer to present at the orientation sessions. The response from NVCC faculty has been awesome. They volunteer to be mentors and to present orientation sessions knowing that the sessions are scheduled during "pre-contract" time and not knowing they might receive a stipend for the mentoring. The college has a wealth of knowledge in the veteran instructors who teach there. NVCC is a teaching college without an education department. However, the faculty members have a number of tools they use to enhance teaching effectiveness. Veteran instructors willingly share their "tool kits" with new colleagues.

While evaluation of the program was positive, it did identify areas that needed improvement. First is the need to disseminate timely information to new faculty. The current human resources system is cumbersome because of the state hiring process. All new faculty should get as much advance notice as possible of meeting dates, especially those held before the academic calendar officially begins. Second is the need for the college to institutionalize the New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program. If the program were institutionalized, all new faculty would have the same opportunity to attend the programs. As it is now, some campus or division activities can take precedence over the new faculty orientation sessions. Institutionalizing the program would also mean making it a line item in the college budget. Horton is in the second and last year of her Commonwealth's Professorship, and the DCRT must request funds for stipends annually. It would strengthen the program to have it funded on a permanent basis for the future. Finally, a member of the college staff should assume responsibility for program delivery. Horton represented the teaching faculty in instantiating the program, but the actual administration of the established program can be more effectively completed through staff members, perhaps the office of the Dean of Academic and Student Services. The work completed by the current coordinator could be incorporated easily into that office.

The DCRT has once again applied for institutional priority funding from the college to continue the stipends for new faculty mentors, based on the excellent results of the first year's program. In addition to fully funding new faculty orientation and mentoring on a permanent basis, the DCRT has asked for an additional $5500 to create a second task

force charged with the development of a tandem New Adjunct Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program. It is hoped that within the next two academic years, Northern Virginia Community College will have orientation and mentoring for all new faculty as a priority for professional development in order to maintain invigorated and renewed instructors and to attract and retain a highly qualified teaching faculty.

Note: Further information about the program can be found on the Northern Virginia Community College Faculty Orientation website: http://www.nvcc.vccs.edu/woodbridge/chdivision/Orientation/FacOrientation.htm.

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